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Inventory for Manuscript Collection MS-117

Ship *J. A. Thomson* Records
Inclusive dates: 1868-1887
Bulk dates: 1879-1882

by
Denise Fields
(edited by Anastasia S. Weigle and Nathan Lipfert)
July 2012

Shelf feet: .5 linear feet
Number of boxes: 1
Accession 71.151.1

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Abstract

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Vessel Papers, *J. A. Thomson* (Ship)

Papers, 1868-1887 (Bulk dates: 1879-1882)

1 Manuscript size box, (.25 Shelf feet)

The *J. A. Thomson* (Ship) was built at Bath, Maine by Asa P. Hodgkins in 1869, and sunk in 1916.

Papers relating to the *J. A. Thomson* (Ship). Included are correspondence, account summaries, general accounts, charter parties, freight and cargo accounts, portage bill, crew accounts, and list of stores on board. Other items in the collections are a northern hemisphere horn card from Piddington's *Law of Storms* and various published papers.

Purchased with funds from the Davenport Fund

MS-117. Accession No. 71.151.1

Related material: MS-335 Capt. J. A. Thomson Papers.

Related material, artifact: Wheel, Steering—Cover, "J. A. Thomson" Acc.# 67.2288

Finding aid available in repository; folder level control.

Added entries—persons:

Rogers, Charles J. [Jabez] *Captain* (1848-1927)

Davenport, Charles

Added entries—corporate bodies (including vessels)

J. A. Thomson (Ship)

Added entries—key terms:

Accounts

Bills of Lading

Charter-parties

Freight and freightage

Invoices

Letters of instruction to captains

Merchant seamen

Sea captains

Wages

Acquisition

The vessel papers for the *J. A. Thomson* (Ship) were purchased on May 27, 1971 with funds donated to Bath Marine Museum from the Davenport Fund, accession No. 71.151.1. Bath Marine Museum is former name of Maine Maritime Museum.

Provenance

This collection was purchased with Davenport Funds from an unidentified dealer.

Restrictions

There are no restrictions on the study or use of these materials.

Physical Condition

The papers in this collection have some minor tears and surface dirt but are in overall good condition.

Processing Notes

The papers were originally sorted by volunteers but after a thorough survey of the papers, the collection was reorganized to better reflect the activities of the vessel. There was a small number of receipts and invoices that I decided to place in one folder but grouped them into voyages. Each group was placed in a 20 lb text acid free folder which were then placed in the primary folder. In order to have some idea of the vessel's travels, a chart was created listing various ports the ship *J. A. Thomson* travelled to. This information was gathered from invoices, correspondence, charter parties, account summaries, invoices, receipts, and crewman wages. The collection itself was organized following the standard sequence and in chronological order. Below is the organization of the series.

Historical Notes

The ***J. A. Thomson*** (Ship) was built by Asa P. Hodgkins of Bath, Me in 1869 for Albert Hathorne. The vessel measured 195.2 feet in length, 37.6 foot breadth, and 23.9 foot depth. Capt. J. A. Thomson is listed commander in *The Record of American and Foreign Shipping* starting from 1872-73 through 1876. Capt. George Thomson is listed as shipmaster in 1878. The 1879 edition lists Charles J. Rogers as shipmaster while the 1882 erroneously lists the shipmaster's name as Charles H. Rogers. Information from the collection shows that Capt. Charles J. Rogers was in command of the *J. A. Thomson* (Ship) from 1878 to 1882. Sometime between 1874 and 1876, the ship's managing ownership transferred from A. Hawthorne to Charles Davenport.[1]

Information from the extant vessel papers show that the vessel moved cargo from port to port without returning to its home port of Bath. Charter parties and invoices from a three year period between August 1878 and December 1881 show that Captain Rogers

took his vessel to Atlantic and Pacific trade routes *(see Appendix A: Voyage Table).* The primary cargos moved were refined petroleum, coal, and wheat/flour.[2]

The *J. A. Thomson* (Ship) made several voyages between 1879 and 1882 following many different trade routes including trips across the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. The *J. A. Thomson* (Ship) was sold on October 3, 1882 to Germany while it was in New York and renamed *Margaretha*. The vessel was later re-rigged as a bark, changed hands and nationalities again becoming the *Greta* (Bark) out of Sweden. The vessel was destroyed by fire, probably as a result submarine action near Hirtshals in northern Denmark on October 17, 1916. The crew was saved.[8]

The vessel was notable to its later owners for having fidded royal masts—in other words, masts made from four spars rather than the usual three. A photograph of her after becoming a bark shows this on fore and main masts. Also, the Museum's collection contains a unique decorative wheel cover from this ship (67.2288).

Biographical Notes

Captain Charles Jabez Rogers was born in Topsham, Maine on February 9, 1848 the second son of George A. Rogers (1819-1874) and Mary S. Perkins (1822-1901). Captain Rogers first went to sea as a boy on the *Midas* (Bark). Capt. Rogers married Jennie Martha Roberts (b.?-d.1927) on January 18, 1873. They had two children, George Albion (b.1873-d.?) born in England and Herbert Lincoln (b.1877-d.?) born in Maine. According to her obituary, Jennie made several voyages with Capt. Rogers but it is unknown at this time which vessels she voyaged on. Captain Rogers took command of the *J. A. Thomson* (Ship) in 1878.

When Captain Rogers took a cargo of refined petroleum to Japan in 1879, the Japan market was still relatively new. Japan had closed almost all contact with the western world in 1639 in response to persistent efforts of Europeans to convert the Japanese people to Catholicism and unfair trading practices. With the admittance of California to United States in 1850, the US had renewed interest in trading with Asia from Pacific ports. After much negotiation, the United States and Japan signed their first commercial treaty in 1858.[3] Twenty years later, Captain Rogers received a letter dated January 29, 1879 from Edwin Reed asking Capt. Rogers to

> *"pick me up for me at little expense something in the way of Japanese ware or pottery for my table…perhaps your merchant might suggest something in textile fabrics that would please Mrs. R. or adorn the house."* [4]

Reference to Capt. Rogers life is mentioned in one letter dated June 15, 1882.

> *"All of your friends here so far as we know are well and we hope you and your good wife and children are the same."* [5]

A letter to Capt. Rogers from L. C. Blair of Fox and Blair Ship Stores Dealer in Liverpool thanks Capt. Rogers for information that he had forwarded to them regarding the vessels in the port at Antwerp. Blair writes,

> *"I should have been pleased to have stayed there and seen Capt. Joe Thomson. I received a letter a few days since from Capt. George Thomson he said if I saw you to give you his kind regard."* [6]

It is not clear if these captains were the same J. A. and George Thomson who were once in command of the *J. A. Thomson* (Ship).

By May 18, 1882 the owners were considering selling the vessel. Charles Davenport wrote to Capt. Rogers telling him:

> *"Some of the smaller owners would like to sell if she would bring her value."* He continues with *"I have offered the J. A. Thomson for £8500 cash, as she shall be discharged in Antwerp, and she ought to bring that sum; as wooden ships are not costing more than a year or two, owing to the higher prices of ship materials and labor. Still in view of the dullness of freight, we might be induced to accept £8000 if no more could be obtained: and would like for you to inform me the best offer, by cable, (not less than £8000) naming the lowest rate of commission for selling…if the ship cannot be sold, then we should want some business for her, but I hardly know what to say with regard to that."*[7]

On July 7, 1882 Charles Davenport sent a telegraph to Capt. Rogers which simply stated, *"Come New York – Davenport."*

References Cited:

1. Record of American and Foreign shipping 1872, 1873-74, 1876, 1878, 1882
2. Charter parties, MS 117 Folder 7
3. http://history.state.gov/milestones/1830-1860/OpeningtoJapan
4. Reed, Edwin. Letter. July 29, 1879 MS117 Folder 1
5. Hanley & Snow. Letter. June 15, 1882. MS 117 Folder 4
6. Blair, L. C. Letter. June 26, 1882. MS 117 Folder 4
7. Davenport, Charles. Letter. May 18, 1882. MS 117 Folder 4
8. MS 54 Box 146

Scope and Content Notes

The *J.A. Thomson* (Ship) papers consist of a single box of records primarily pertaining to the *J. A. Thomson* (Ship) between 1879 and 1882. Items in the collection include correspondence, receipts, invoices, charter parties, bills of lading, freight and cargo receipts, seamen accounts, various port rules and regulation circulars, and a horn card from Piddington's *Law of Storms*. There are thirty-seven (37) letters in this collection that are primarily of a business nature. These letters discuss upcoming charter parties, accounts, and the selling of cargo. The papers cover many voyages to and from ports around the globe including: Cardiff, Rio de Janeiro, New York, Yokahama, Iloilo, Hong Kong, Vancouver Islands, B.C., San Francisco, Havre, and Antwerp. Freight and cargo were primarily refined petroleum, coal, wheat/flour, and sugar. Receipts and invoices reflect the repairs to the vessel and preparations for voyages. The seamen account books (Feb.–June 1882 and Feb.-Aug. 1882) list twenty-two crew members, their nationalities, and debits against their wages.

Included with the vessel papers is a horn card from Henry Piddington's *The Sailors Horn-Book for the Law of Storms its uses to Mariners of all classes in all parts of the World Shewn by Transparent Storm Cards and Useful Lessons*. Henry Piddington, President of Marine Courts of Enquiry, Calcutta (New York: John Wiley, 1848). Piddington was a merchant seaman who studied the wind patterns of storms coining the phase "cyclone" for the circular storms north of the equator that moved in a counter-clockwise direction. In his book, Piddington explains how the circular movements of the winds change traditional navigation techniques. The book included two cards, one for the northern hemisphere and one for the southern, which used arrows to show the direction of the wind. The cards were used to aid in navigation and to determine the location of a storm's center in order to avoid the dangerous winds when possible and to sail with the wind to the vessel's advantage.

Lastly, there are port rules and regulations for Port Antwerp (n.d.), Philippine Islands (n.d.), Puget Sound (1868), Manila (1879) and a Circular for the Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (1881). One circular advertising various freights for charters from London dated June 1, 1882.

An appendix for all voyages made by the ship *J. A. Thomason* identified in this collection can be found before the container list.

References cited for Horn Card:

1. Piddington, Henry. The sailor's horn-book for the law of storms. London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1848.2.
2. http://www.banglapedia.org/httpdocs/HT/P_0168.HTM

Organization of Series

Series I . Vessel Correspondence
Subseries Ia. Capt. Chas. J. Rogers
Subseries Ib. Other
Series II. Vessel Accounts
Series III. Horn Card
Series IV. Ephemera
Appendix A: Voyage tracker with vessel location and date

Description of Series

Series I. Correspondence (1879-1882): Correspondence primarily to Capt. Charles J. Rogers from the owner, Charles Davenport and various ship brokers, regarding the loading and unloading of freight, new charters, and pertaining to the sale of the vessel. Correspondence are identified incoming and outgoing and listed in chronological order by creation date. The series is grouped into two subseries. **Subseries Ia:** Correspondence, Capt. Charles J. Rogers and **Subseries Ib:** Other pertains to correspondence about Capt. Rogers and/or the ship *J. A. Thomson*.

Series II. Accounts (1873-1882): Vessel papers for the *J. A. Thomson* (Ship) including account summaries, general accounts, charter parties, freight and cargo documents, portage bill, crew accounts, and a store list.

Series III. Horn Card (n.d.): The horn card for the northern hemisphere from Henry Piddington's *The Sailors Horn-Book for the Law of Storms its Uses to Mariners of all Classes in all Parts of the World Shewn by Transparent Storm Cards and Useful Lessons.*
Series IV. Ephemera (1868-82): Maritime documents such port rules and regulations and freight circular for.

APPENDIX A: VOYAGE TRACKER — VESSEL LOCATION & DATE
(created using partial list of collection materials)

Date	Document	Depart from:	Arrive to:	Type of Cargo
26 Feb. 1873	Charter Party	Cardiff	Rio de Janeiro	coal
23 May 1878	Bill of lading	Nanaimo, BC	San Francisco	coal
7 Aug. 1878	Charter Party	New York	Yokahama	Refined petroleum
16 Jan. 1879	letter		Yokohama	
23 April 1879	letter		Victoria, BC	
22 May 1879	letter		BC	
2 Oct. 1879	letter		Queenstown	
19 Dec. 1879	letter		Queenstown	
12 Jan. 1880	Charter Party	Newport/Cardiff	Hong Kong	Coal
22 Jan. 1880	letter		Cardiff	
9 Feb. 1880	letter		Cardiff	
21 May 1880	letter		Hong Kong	
3 July 1880	Charter Party	Iliolo	New York	Dry sugar
17 Sept. 1880	letter		Iloilo	
13 March 1881	Charter Party	New York	Yokahama	Refined petroleum
17 Jan. 1880	freight		Havre	Wheat
7 Feb. 1880	receipt		Liverpool	
28 April 1881	receipts (2)		New York	
5 May 1881	receipt		New York	
6 May 1881	receipts (2)		New York	
9 May 1881	receipt		New York	
24 Oct. 1881	Charter Party	Departure Bay	San Francisco	Coal
4 Nov. 1881	receipt		Victoria, BC	
8 Dec. 1881	Bill of Lading	Departure Bay	San Francisco	Coal
8 Dec. 1881	Charter Party	San Fran	Liverpool/Havre	Wheat/flour
31 Jan. 1882	Bill of Lading	San Fran	Antwerp	Flour
31 Jan. 1882	Bill of Lading	San Fran	Antwerp	Wheat
15 June 1882	receipt		Antwerp	
1 July 1882	freight		Antwerp	
8 July 1882	freight		Antwerp	Scrap iron
28 July 1882	receipt		Antwerp	
5 Aug. 1882	receipt		Antwerp	

MS 117: *J. A. Thomson* (Ship) Vessel Papers
Container List

Box#	Folder#	
SERIES I. Correspondence		
		Subseries Ia. Capt. Charles J. Rogers
		Incoming
1	1	n.d., January - May 1879
	2	October - December 1879
	3	January - September 1880
	4	May - July 1882
		Outgoing
	5	July 1886 and October 1887
		Subseries Ib. Other
	6	Charles T. Russell & Company, 1882
SERIES II. Accounts		
	7	Memorandum of sailcloth, n.d.
	8	Summaries, 1879-82
	9	General invoices—by voyage
		.1 Boston, August 1878
		.2 New York, 1879
		.3 San Francisco, June-July 1879
		.4 Havre and Liverpool, Jan.-Feb. 1880
		.5 New York, April – May 1881
		.6 Yokohama, Oct. 1881
		.7 Departure Bay, B.C., Nov. 1881
		.8 Antwerp, Jun-July 1882
	10	Charter parties, 1873-81
	11	Freight & cargo, n.d., 1879-82
		Accounts, crew
	12	Portage bill, 1887
	13	Seamen's accounts and wages, 1882
	14	Stores, Liverpool, n.d.
SERIES III. Artifact		
	15	Horn card, northern hemisphere, Piddington's *Law of Storms,* n.d.
SERIES IV. Ephemera		
	16	Circulars -— Port rules and regulations (Port Antwerp, Philippe Islands, Puget Sound, and Manila) n.d., 1868, 1879, 1881
	17	Circulars —various freights for charter, (London, June 1, 1882)